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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

AUTHOR: MAJOR CHRISTOPHER P. O'CONNOR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Understanding the Taliban's Border Sanctuary and Finding the Key to Success.

Author: Major Christopher P. O'Connor, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: While the war continues in Afghanistan, many arguments have been made as to the enemy's source of strength (center of gravity) against the United States and its Coalition Partners. While there are those that believe that the enemy's strength comes from a certain tribe or group of population (which maybe the case), in order to succeed in defeating this strategic center of gravity, however, the United States and its regional partners must focus its efforts on the operational center of gravity first. Only after denying the enemy its sanctuary areas along the Afghanistan and Pakistan border (that it currently has) will the United States and its coalition partners enjoy the success that they seek in this region.

Discussion: Since borders were originally developed wars have been fought over them. Many insurgencies have used borders to support their causes. As with the Soviets in the 1980's (and British for that matter) not much has changed for the United States in its current campaign in Afghanistan. Since the creation of the Afghanistan and Pakistan border by the British in 1893 (Durand Line), Afghanistan has found itself embroiled in largely a period of unrest. Repeatedly the Afghans have found one invader after the next trying to influence Afghanistan. Afghanistan since its creation (and even before) has been a nation of loosely bound tribes that have often only had loyalty within their own tribes. Whether or not Afghanistan has a central government or not has had little to any effect on these tribes and nowhere is this more evident than in the Pashtun tribes of the Afghan and Pakistan border region. Due to this condition, these border tribes have always seen themselves as strongly independent, opportunistic, and self-persevering. As a result of this mindset, those tribes located between the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan have border in essence created their own country within two countries which many are calling Pashtunistan. With this in mind, enemy groups like Al Qaeda and the Taliban have been able to find refuge and gain support in this area by using this border region to their advantage. Until this border area becomes better controlled, the refuge and support it provides will continue to enable the enemy to enjoy its success at a cost that the United States and Afghanistan.

Conclusion: With the lessons learned from previous wars that anytime the enemy is given any form of safe haven to operate from they have always been able to make the counterinsurgency fighting them much more complicated. In this case, if we do not apply a suitable approach that brings the United States and its allies to put a synergistic effort against the Taliban's sanctuary as well as apply Afghan governance teams to better support the Afghan people, the United States and its allies are going run out of time in a waiting game that the US cannot afford to play.

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Introduction

As the war in Afghanistan approaches its ninth year, it is becoming ever more critical that all efforts and energies expended are put together in the most flexible and efficient means possible. In order to achieve victory, the United States (US) as part of International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) will need to use all means necessary to defeat the Taliban and al Qaeda in a country that has been disrupted by war for the last 30 years. Whether victory is at best a fully established functioning republic government or at worst one step above a failed state, as long as Afghanistan is capable of functioning as a nearly autonomous state, the US will likely be happy with the results. In either case (functioning republic government or one step ahead of a failed state) as long as Afghanistan does not again become a breeding ground for fundamentalist extremism the US and its allies will be content. With that said, as the time available to secure victory becomes ever more precious the US and its allies must look to a successful operational strategy in order to achieve these results. Few professionals argue that the Taliban's strategic Center Of Gravity (COG) is their large tribally linked population that straddles the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. While this may be true, what must be first focused on is an operational strategy that deals with the sanctuary between Afghanistan and Pakistan that gives the Taliban its operational COG.

Defining COG's

In further understanding the strength of the enemy in Afghanistan, it is necessary to define COG. Joint publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, defines the center of gravity "the source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act."[1] While this definition is often argued as to

its accuracy, Carl von Clausewitz loosely refers to the strategic center of gravity as "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends".[2] While using these definitions to describe what is meant by center of gravity it is also important to discuss the differences between an operational and strategic center of gravity.

As with understanding the difference between operational and strategic warfare, operational COG lend support to their strategic COG. Ultimately, to then achieve success against a strategic COG it is necessary to first defeat or significantly weaken the operational COG that supports it. Colonel Dale C. Eikmeier describes this concept in the following excerpt from his 2004 article "Center of Gravity Analysis":

> Defeating an enemy's strategic centers of gravity in a single strike is difficult if not impossible. So as with attacking any complex problem, we can break strategic centers of gravity down into more manageable pieces. Campaigns focus on these pieces, which are operational centers of gravity. A campaign should be part of a step by step process that directly or indirectly attacks these operational centers of gravity or sets the stage for future campaigns that attack operational centers of gravity. The defeat of operational centers of gravity weakens strategic centers of gravity.[3]

Additionally he states:

> An operational center of gravity is something that protects a strategic center of gravity. Typically, operational centers of gravity are military capabilities or forces. Another way to define an operational center of gravity is to identify what blocks a commander's direct access to his opponent's strategic center of gravity. Identifying obstacles reveals a strong candidate for an operational center of gravity.[4]

While this view on operational COG's applies more in a conventional warfare environment than to unconventional warfare environment its context however can still be used. Taking the points that Col Eikmeier's makes about how an operational COG is normally that thing that "protects" or "blocks" gives this definition meaning in an unconventional war. For example, if an unconventional threat's strategic COG is defined as the population, then it would

be logical to view any significant sanctuary or safe haven area that "protects" or "blocks" this strategic COG from attack as an operational COG. By applying this reasoning to the war in Afghanistan and understanding that the 40 million Pashtun tribes people are the strategic COG for the Taliban then the sanctuary along the Afghan and Pakistan border that supports them becomes the operational COG.[5]

History of the Afghan Pakistan Border Region.

The problems in Afghanistan today arise from the fact that since its formation it has at best been a loose group of tribes and at worst a centralized government with weak control of its tribes. Either way, because of its location, Afghanistan has always seemed an easy target for one outside power or another to come along and try to establishing one form of favorable government or another. Even though this has happened repeatedly over the centuries, no one country has ever made any genuine progress trying to do it.

In better understanding why the sanctuary in the Afghanistan and Pakistan border region is a Taliban operational COG, it is important to understand the history behind it. Since its creation as a modern state in 1747 by Ahmed Shah Durrani (the first King of Afghanistan), Afghanistan has had a complicated history. Shaped by violent turmoil caused by tribal disputes, outside political influences, weak leadership (or the perception of weak leadership) and a strategic location, Afghanistan still remains much the same today. [6]

Starting with the initial period of British and Russian influences that later became known as the "Great Game", both countries used their diplomatic, economic, and at times military power to try and leverage the Afghan leadership in one favorable direction or the other. Based largely on British paranoia about Russian threats to India, the Afghan leaders found themselves

literally caught in middle of these two major world powers. Although caught in the middle, Afghanistan's leadership most often found itself leaning in favor of the British in return for their money and weapons. While this was not always the case, what was almost always certain was that when the Afghanistan's leadership found itself dealing in favor of either the British or Russians, it largely isolated itself from the Afghan people and their strong desires for independence.

Being fiercely independent people, the Afghans saw any foreign presence or influence as an infringement on their sovereignty (something that still has not changed today). This foreign presence or influence often seen as weakness on the part of the Afghan leadership was sure to create instability both internally and externally. As a result, the British and Afghans fought three different wars and untold skirmishes between the early 1800's to the mid 1940's (when the British finally withdrew and Pakistan and India gained their independence)[7].

After the second (of three) wars between the British and Afghans, the British in an attempt to better stabilize the region commissioned a man by the name of Mortimer Durand to draw a border that would have a significant impact on this region centuries to come. Handpicked to lead the British effort, Durand would eventually broker a deal with the Afghan King, Abdur Rahman in 1893 that still stands today.[8] Interestingly, before this deal was finalized, several major concerns surfaced . The first and primary concern from the King was that should the British make the border where they intended, they would split the tribes in the region and create unnecessary friction that the British would be required to deal with as long as they occupied the region. Even Colonel Thomas Holdich, the British officer in charge of the survey, concurred with the Rahman and protested the proposed location of the border. Agreeing not only that splitting the tribes with the proposed border would create problems, Col Holdich also believed

that creating a border would give the regional tribesmen a sanctuary behind which they would be able to organize operations against British settlements in India. The British, having little interest in the tribal concerns of the region sought to have border drawn using terrain (Hindu Kush Mountains) that would offer a suitable defense should the Russians threaten India.[9]

Additionally, in part because of the independence of the tribes, both the British and Afghans chose a policy not to directly administer the affected regions. Because of this decision the tribes remained mostly autonomous and were left to govern themselves using their own local customs and law practices called Pashtunwali. Ultimately, little was positively accomplished by signing the Durand Line agreement for either the British or Afghans. While the terms of the agreement did not change much for the British it did take away that land that Afghanistan had historically owned near the fertile Indus River. While this border agreement was not ideal for the Afghans, it would not again become a significant political issue until the creation of Pakistan many years later.

While Afghanistan remained in its usually state of chaos for the next several decades it finally seemed to turn the corner during the reign of King Zahir Shah from 1933 to 1973. Whether it was the product of little outside influence or the establishment of a strong centralized government (or both), this period would be marked by one of the longest stretches of relative peace in Afghanistan history. However, by 1973 the relative peace fell apart once again with the Prime Minister, Sardar Mohammad Daoud overthrowing his first cousin, King Zahir Shah. Following this military coup, Daoud held power for only a few years before the "People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan" (PDPA) took control of the government in a violent overthrow that saw Daoud and his family violently murdered. Once in power, the PDPA found little support from the Afghan people, who strongly resisted the religiously oppressive communist

style of government. As a result of this political miscalculation by the PDPA, the Soviet Union invaded in December 1979 to stabilize the region and force unification in fledgling Afghan communist government. Following the invasion, Afghanistan found itself in a mixed civil war between Afghans backed by Soviet support against Afghans backed by US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabian support.[10]

Afghan-Soviet War

While the Soviets invasion of Afghanistan lasted 10 years, the Soviets ultimately found out that by not being able to deny the enemy sanctuary just across the Afghan and Pakistan border it would cost them tremendously in trying to defeat the insurgency. In the early phases of the Afghan-Soviet War, the Mujahideen fought the communist independently and without the benefit of a unified effort. The Mujahideen's historic mistrust of each other resulted in a piecemealed approach against the Soviets. As the war drew on, the independent actions had little success. Adding to the problem was that many of the major Mujahideen groups had different backers and interests, none of which considered working together until Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) got heavily involved and pressed them unite. With Pakistan's urging, meetings began to take place between different Mujahideen groups that focused on minimizing the internal religious and personal conflict and focusing on the greater enemy. By 1984, Pakistan's efforts to unite the tribes seemed to begin to pay off as well as further obligate itself as a major foreign supporter in the war effort. While it was in Pakistan's political interests to support the Mujahideen, its involvement in the war ultimately created some questionable relationships that lasted long after the war was over.

Later that year, following President Reagan's re-election the US national security plan outlined that the US would support Afghanistan "by all available means".[11] Because of this tremendous commitment of support and better technology, the Mujahideen moved another step closer in putting their differences behind them. Because of the strength in their differences between religious and political views, it still took another year to for the separate Mujahideen groups to come together. However, by 1985 with most of their differences behind them, the Mujhahideen would begin seeing major successes on the battlefield.

Actively and passively opposing the Soviet occupation, the Mujahideen confidence continued to grow and result in significant victories against the communist led government. Additionally, as these gains were being made, tremendous increases in the support for the war (personnel, financing, and weapons) were flooding into Pakistan from the US and Saudi Arabia. Of the more than 100 training camps that would be used in training the Mujahideen fighters for the war, 78 of them would be in Pakistan.[12] With these additional supplies and trained fighters passing through the porous Afghan and Pakistan border, the Mujahideen continued to see battlefield success while the Soviet frustration increased. Gaining ground, the now mostly united Mujahideen effort was just outside the Afghan capital of Kabul regularly assassinating communist government officials and launching rocket attacks into the city. Frustrated by the continued failures of the Afghan government, the Soviets sought to improve their circumstances by changing the Afghan leadership. Unfortunately for the Soviets, however, all this did was postpone an inevitable defeat.

By 1988 the Soviets signed the Geneva Accords that promised a timetable for complete withdrawal. Although agreed upon by Pakistan and the communist Afghanistan government, the Mujahideen were purposefully absent from the talks. Following the signing of the accords, the

Soviets withdrew in February of 1989 leaving a weak communist government still intact. Surprisingly the communist government would remain in power until the defection of General Abdul Rashid Dostam and his Uzbek forces in March 1992. Following the loss of this militia force, the communist government stood little chance and collapsed with the Mujahideen forces moving into Kabul.[13]

While Afghan-Soviet War was more politically and religiously based then the war the US and its coalition partners finds itself in today, a significant miscalculation for the Soviets stemmed from having a low priority for attacking the Mujahideen's sanctuary along the Afghanistan and Pakistan border. While the Soviets did conduct limited operations along the border region to include Pakistan, little was ever done to genuinely disrupt the flow of support coming out of it. Because the Soviets did not seriously interdict or disrupt the flow of fighters, weapons, and supplies out of Pakistan, the Mujahideen were able to maintain their bases of operations and continue to oppose the Soviet occupation. While the Soviets did leave a communist government in place, it only lasted three years.

Post Afghan-Soviet War

Following the Afghan-Soviet War, the major Mujahideen groups that were primarily composed along of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Turkmens tribal lines began to be faced with a new series of challenges. Most notably of these challenges would be who would become Afghanistan's leader and occupy the historical seat of governance in Kabul. By 1992, as the communist leadership fell, the separate tribes began vying for control Afghanistan. The cracks between the Mujahideen groups that were only ever loosely held together began to come apart. The alliances that held the separate Mujahideen groups together were now broken due to a

return of their historical differences and the power vacuum created by the fall of the communist government. While the true nature of each tribe came to the surface, many of the former Mujahideen allies turned the war towards each other. As to who would run Afghanistan, it would take a devastating civil war to determine the outcome.[14]

The situation further eroded as each of these former Mujahideen allies started seeing outside region powers favor one group or the other. Although the Soviet Union had collapsed in 1991 and the new Russian government no longer had designs on an occupation, the Russians still had concerns about who would best support their regional interest and security. Likewise, so did India, Pakistan, China, and Iran. As these regional powers maneuvered against each other, the eventual alliances surfaced. However, prior to the complete loss of cohesion, the Mujahideen did attempt one more alliance in an interim government to run the country based in a fifty-one member Islamic Jihad Council[15]. Only short lived, the Islamic Jihad Council failed by May 1992 sending the country into a fully fledged civil war.

Over the next several years Afghanistan found itself in a revolving door of power struggles over who would lead Afghanistan. For example, Gulbidin Hekmatyar (leader of the Hezb-e-Islami) who was backed by Pakistan and appointed prime minister in 1993 would fail by 1994 without support from the remainder of the Afghan tribes. As tribal and warlord alliances formed, fell apart and reformed, a small group of disenchanted refugees near Kandahar began to gain support due to their stand against tribal injustice and unscrupulous warlord practices. While the Russians and Iranians sided with the former Mujahideen group now calling themselves the Northern Alliance, Pakistan chose to support a new group calling themselves the Taliban. Because the Taliban had strong Pashtun tribal ties and an inherent dislike for India, Pakistan found this new group a logical choice to bolster its regional security concerns. In the end,

backed by mostly Pakistan and the Saudi Arabia, the Taliban gained control of the majority of Afghanistan to include Kabul. However, due to the support from many of the former Soviet states (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, etc...) and Iran for the Northern Alliance, the Taliban never gained complete control of Afghanistan. The Northern Alliance resisted the Taliban's complete control of Afghanistan by holding their historical lands north of the Hindu Kush.[16]

Understanding the Taliban

The Taliban, whose name in Pashtun means "religious student" or "those who seek knowledge" got their start in 1994 as a group of refugees and orphans tired of the civil war and lack of law and order. Led by Mullah Omar, a moderate cleric and former Mujahideen fighter, the Taliban gained support and found success near Kandahar by taking a stand against the corrupt and brutal tribal leaders and warlords destroying the country.[17]

While most Afghans were seeking some form of stable governance, they had nothing even closely resembling it. As each warlord or former Mujahideen leader fought to take control of Afghanistan, the Afghan civilians were the ones caught in the middle. It was not uncommon for those seeking to control of Afghanistan to mortar and rocket their own cities and civilians. "Gulbuddin Hekmatyar during his time as the prime minister rained rockets down on his own capital; Ahmad Shah Massoud (leader of the Northern Alliance) as defense minister unleashed similar destruction".[18] It would be this lack of regard towards civilian casualties and the infighting among the tribes that would turn the Afghan people (initially) toward supporting the Taliban. While the support for this new seemingly fair government looked to give the Afghan people hope, it soon wore off with the surfacing of strict religious laws, brutal leadership and

poor governance. Lack of basic services, civil support, and human rights left the Afghan people hoping for change.

The downfall of the Taliban eventually stemmed from their historic tribal code of Pashtunwali and the relationship it created with al Qaeda and its leader Osama Bin Laden. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US, the Taliban found themselves pressured to turn over the al Qaeda leadership or suffer the consequences. Having to provide refuge to outsiders as part of the Pashtunwali code, the Taliban held true to this code and denied the US' request. As a result of demonstrating this loyalty to al Qaeda, the US organized and invaded Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban Government in October of 2001.

Following the rapid invasion and swift offensive, the Taliban were defeated by the US, its coalition partners, and its Afghan partner the Northern Alliance. Seeking to install a US supported government, Hamid Karzai would be brought in to lead the post Taliban Afghanistan Government as president. After being overthrown the Taliban withdrew quickly to their historic strongholds and sanctuary. For several years the Taliban regrouped and reorganized in southern Afghanistan and western Pakistan only to reemerge as a new stronger organization by early 2006. The Taliban, in effort to regroup (like the Mujahideen before them) found themselves aligning with other groups that they historically opposed. Lacking guidance, leadership, and direction from the new Afghan government, many groups found themselves being better aligned with the Taliban ideologically then the new Karzi led government. Because of these failures in government, the Taliban began pulling together with the Haqqani network and Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin movement and as well as al Qaeda to further strengthen their organization.[19]

As a result, the new Taliban organization has grown and increased in strength over the last several years to have made significant gains against the government of Afghanistan. So much so that the US, its coalition partners, and the Afghan Government supporters have had to make significant changes to better adjust to the current situation. Making the most of the ungoverned border areas to recruit, train, and finance their effort, the Taliban have once again emerged as a formidable enemy. In understanding how the Taliban were able to use their sanctuary to support their reemergence it is important to understand the complexities of Pakistan.

Pakistan

Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, many challenges have developed for this relatively young country that was formed with five separate and distinct Muslim groups (Bengalis, Punjabis, Pashtun, Sindhis, and Baloch). The Bengalis in 1971 were the only group to have broken away and created their own country in what is now Bangladesh. While the Bengalis gained their independence with the support of India, ethnic groups like the Baloch and the Pashtun still by and large distrust the Pakistan government. However, if there is one ethnic minority groups that is content with Pakistan it would be the Punjabis who are strongly represented in Pakistan's government and military as well as industry and business. Because of its strong diversity and the historical challenges, Pakistan with a population of 170 million and nuclear power remains immensely complex and important to the region.[20]

Sandwiched between the Soviets and their Indian allies, Pakistan has historically benefited from its alliances with the US and Saudi Arabia. During Afghan-Soviet War and bordered by no regional allies, Pakistan found it economically and diplomatically beneficial to act as the middle man for the Afghan support entering the war. Backed by the US and Saudi

Arabia, Pakistan carried the majority of the responsibility of getting the vast amounts of the incoming weapons, supplies, and money into the war. With Pakistan struggling at times to manage this new role, it is questionable how much the material support ever made it to the Mujahideen fighting in Afghanistan versus what ended up in markets and bazaars for profit of those responsible for its distribution. Even though this corruption was rampant, the support that did eventually make it to the Afghan fighters made a tremendous difference in the outcome of the war.[21]

By the time the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, Pakistan's focus would turn to finding as favorable government as possible to support their regional concerns. Due to its tribal connection with the Pashtun tribes, Pakistan decided to support the Taliban and see them eventually rise to power. Supporting the Taliban did several things for the Pakistan Government. First, being largely Pashtun, the Taliban's tribal links would have them favor Pakistan versus India, Russia, or Iran. Second it served to stabilize Pashtun minority concerns in Pakistan about government support of their Afghan tribesmen. Finally and most importantly, this deal gave Pakistan the strategic depth they believe they need in the event of a war with India.[22]

Pashtunistan

While Pashtunistan (meaning land of the Pashtun) does not show up as a country on any maps, it can be argued that it exist in practice. Similar to Kurdistan, Pashtunistan is the name of a theoretical nation that would represent a largely homogenous group of people divided over several countries. Split between eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan and divided by the Durand Line, Pashtunistan is just one of many regions in the world that are a result of failed colonial policy. Given the fact that Pashtun tribes make up nearly 40 million people (12 million

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in Afghanistan and 27 million Pakistan), have their own language, have their own laws (Pashtunwali), and are centralized in one region of the world many argue why it could not stand as its own country. [23]

Many of those seeking stability in the region have called to see the Durand Line changed and redrawn to have Pashtunistan established as a country between modern Afghanistan and Pakistan. As feasible as this may sound, it is unlikely that it will ever occur. While certainly some would want this, many are happy with the current state of affairs. With a large number of Pashtuns filling key leadership positions in both Afghanistan and Pakistan many of them see this as a "best of both worlds" scenario that already allows them to govern the regions that would make Pashtunistan if it were to exist anyway. Because of the way the current laws have supported regional autonomy, it is questionable that Pakistan has ever controlled this region or even intended to do so. By paying and empowering the tribal leaders to govern, Pakistan has adopted the "hands off" approach similar to the policies the British used when they "controlled" the region. As a result, areas like the seven agencies of Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) (Figure 1) still exist much as they always have in exchange for a good-natured relationship with their host government. While this has been a suitable solution for many years, the re-emergence of the Taliban in this area has proven to present a number of problems not only for Pakistan and Afghanistan, but the US as well.

An example of this is that shortly after the fall of the Taliban, elements within Pakistan were already trying to see that the Afghan Government would not succeed. As early as September 2002, benefiting from the sanctuary, covert aid, and assistance that they were getting from inside Pakistan, the Taliban began their Improvised Explosive Device (IED) campaign against US bases and Afghan Government officials.[24]

McChrystal's Plan

  While the US and its coalition partners continue to proceed in this counterinsurgency, significant changes have recently been made. General Stanley McChrystal, US Army (USA) has replaced General David McKiernan (USA) who after less than a year was relieved in what was described as a lack of confidence. [25] While the reason for Gen McKiernan's dismissal is not clear, the message it sends certainly is. In addition to the change in command, President Obama has also approved an increase in troop end strength which will send an additional thirty-thousand troops.

  Known as a counterinsurgency expert with years of experience working in the Special Operations Command (SOCOM), General McChrystal has taken an aggressive approach to refocus the efforts of this coalition. Recognizing that the Afghan people have been at war for 30 years, McChrystal knows that the people are frustrated and understands that this frustration opens the door for the insurgency (as it did for the Taliban during the Afghan civil war in the 1990's).

  As outlined in General McChrystal's counterinsurgency guidance to ISAF released in August 2009, the mission for Afghanistan is "to help the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) defeat the insurgency threatening their country".[26] By focusing on spending more time and energy on the population while taking less chances with damaging the Afghan's public confidence (reducing civilian casualties) as well as train, equip, and professionalize the military and police forces, General McChrytal's plan can work. General McCrystal writes in his counterinsurgency guidance that,

We need to understand the people and see things through their eyes. It is their fears, frustrations, and expectations that we must address. We will not win simply by killing insurgents. We will help that Afghan people win by securing them, by protecting them from intimidation, violence, and abuse, and by operating in a way that respects their culture and religion. This means that we must change the way that we think, act and operate. We must get the people involved as active participants in the success of their communities.

While this guidance does a great job of setting the conditions for the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan it does not describe what needs to happen regionally and why. All the ideas and methods outlined in the guidance are effective and have been historically proven to work, but when the combined effects cannot reach the entire battle space, it is doubtful it will have its intended results. In order for this message to have the complete effect that it intends, it must target everywhere the insurgency has a hold on the population. Using the one dimensional drone attacks to target Taliban leadership in the sanctuary that they currently enjoy may have some immediate results, but will not address this situation in the long run. Until General McChystal's counterinsurgency message can have the same reach with a similar acceptance, technique, and vigor in the sanctuary of areas like the FATA, the US, its coalition partners and Afghanistan will continue to have the near impossible task to defeat the insurgency.

The Pashtun tribes that live their lives on both sides of the border know that blood is thicker than water and arguably owe their existence to this loyalty. It is because of this loyalty that unless all efforts are focused to fight the insurgency on both sides of the border no one method will be enough to accomplish General McChrystal's mission. Recognizing the important role of Pakistan in the Afghanistan counterinsurgency, even President Obama has begun to publically address his concerns about Pakistan. In his December 2009 address to the nation, President Obama mentioned Pakistan or Pakistani at least 25 times.[27] Having the President

publically recognized Pakistan in this manner leaves little left to doubt that Pakistan will play a critical role in the success or failure of Afghanistan.

In reading General McChrystal's mission statement, the key word that jumps out is "help". Many agree that Afghanistan needs our help, but many would also argue: isn't that what the US has been doing since it invaded in October 2001? While the answer is yes, the reason that the US is in the position it is in is largely due to its own actions during the early part of this war. By choosing not to focus on stabilizing and developing the new government following the invasion in 2001, the US has allowed the Afghan government and the region to weaken. Additionally, by taking its attention away from Afghanistan and placing it in Iraq, the US further compounded regional issues that facilitated the Taliban's reemergence from their sanctuary better prepared as legitimate insurgency force with an increased lethality by early 2006 (Figure 2).

Having Iraq finally begin to stabilize by 2007 has allowed the US to return focus on an ever so desperate situation in Afghanistan with a new determination. Having benefitted from many of the lessons learned during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and the early part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) the US has returned to Afghanistan a much improved counter-insurgency force better prepared to deal with many of the issues it is facing. Leaders determined to improve their units counterinsurgency abilities have in recent years turned to timeless counter-insurgency references like the "Small Wars Manual" and "The Village" and as well as the military's new "Counter Insurgency Manual" to better understand the methods and means of conducting a counter insurgency. Additionally, by 2007 the US military has had the benefit of a large portion of its military operating in one insurgency or the other to give it tremendous experience that it did not have in the early part of the war.

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<u>Finding a Solution</u>

As long as the sanctuary along the Afghan and Pakistan border remains an operational COG for the Taliban in Afghanistan, the chances of success by the US and its coalition partners (ISAF) remains minimal. To improve in its current mission with relationship to both Afghanistan and Pakistan, the US must modify its approach to attacking this operational COG on both sides of the border. With that said, there are two approaches that can be applied (ideally together) to attack this portion of the insurgency. The first is ensuring that all governments involved in the region strike an agreement that will allow a unity of effort approach to both sides of the Afghan and Pakistan border. The second is by using Governance Engagement Teams (GETs) to counter the rampant corruption as well as create awareness in the tribes about the benefits of a modern Afghan government.

In using the first approach, what must be made clear is that if an agreement cannot be made as to how Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the US will use a combined effort creating synergistic approach to this counter-insurgency against the Taliban the chances of success will be minimal. However, in the event that a suitable plan can be agreed upon, the US must demonstrate a willingness to stay regionally engaged in one form or another. Repeating how the US abandoned the region after the Soviet-Afghan War would again have the same disastrous consequences that created this situation to begin with.

The US must continue to embrace all facets of General McChrystal's plan until at least 2011 or as additionally directed by President Obama. However, even after 2011, the US must have a regionally dedicated plan to turn to remain engaged the region indefinitely. Any wavering of this long term commitment will, as seen before, play into the hands of the Taliban.

Using the current methods outlined in General McChrystal's plan is proving effective. Minimizing civilian casualties and emphasizing the clear, hold, and build approach to provide the Afghan people security in the Taliban's strongholds are having results. Having the U.S. State Department work to smooth Pakistan and Indian fears has proven to make a major difference in the focus of the Pakistan military against the Taliban. Likewise, Marine Corps action in the Helmand province the last 12 months has been proof to this methods effectiveness. Maj. Gen. Mills in speaking to the Marines of the 2nd Expeditionary Force (II MEB) said,

> Helmand province is a different place because of their efforts. It's different because of the tactics and success they had on the battlefield. It's different because of the success they had in the governance and economic area. They have truly changed the lives of the Afghan people and they have done that by paying with blood, sweat and tears required to accomplish a great tough mission. While true success must be achieved by, with and through the Afghan people, MEB-Afghanistan has laid the groundwork for a transition of authority to the Afghan government, in what has been described as one of the most challenging provinces in the nation.[28]

By Pakistan's use of the same or similar methods, it is realistic that they too may be able to seriously weaken a growing Taliban problem that they are experiencing as well. The intermittent pressure by Pakistan on the Taliban since 2001 has created an appearance of weakness on the Pakistan military's part. Seeing the Pakistan Government demonstrate indecision with use of their military in recent years has created an opportunity for the Taliban to strike back at this perceived weakness. The 2009 summer attacks by the Taliban into the Swat Valley that reached 90 miles from the Pakistan capital of Islamabad have sent strong messages that the insurgency is no longer only an Afghan problem. While Pakistan has a large responsibility in creating this unrest it is not entirely alone. The US' interests or lack thereof in nation building has played a large part in the instability in the region as well. Seeing the US enter into a war with Iraq only reaffirmed the US' lack of interest in seeing Afghanistan through and forced many in Pakistan to look at operating as they did since the

Afghan-Soviet War.[29] However, now that the US has largely removed itself from its Iraq, it has reemerged with a more focused approach. Pakistan must again come back to the negotiating table to create the synergy that the region requires to succeed in defeating this insurgency. By the US taking the lead on getting Afghanistan and Pakistan to continue improve their combined efforts the Taliban will be seriously weakened. Most importantly, once the Taliban are weakened enough, the border sanctuary that they have historically used can be brought back under control and no longer allowed to support their cause. Additionally, Afghanistan and Pakistan must remain committed to work together long into the future. Setbacks over commitment issues and historical concerns like territory and government mistrust must be staunchly avoided and put to rest to ultimately achieve success.

Using the second approach of Government Engagement Team (GETs) would not be much different than what many of the strategies are already calling for and that is tribal engagement. However, instead of using popular tribal engagement plans like that of Major Jim Gant's (USA) "One Tribe at a Time" 45 page paper (Washington Post January 10, 2010) or turning the Afghan tribe's traditional defense forces or Arbakai into a model similar to the one used in the "Sons of Iraq" (Washington Post, April 28, 2008), this approach would simply focus on developing an understanding of governance and how it will work for Afghans. While these approaches have certain qualities that could be added to the counterinsurgency fight, neither of them attacks the issue that if Afghanistan cannot make its current style of government (or something close to it) work for them or they will be destined to fail.

What may turn out to be most surprising about the GET concept purposed in this paper is that it is not far from what most Afghans have been doing throughout their history. Having the

tribal leadership make decisions on behalf of the tribesmen in a traditional loya jirga or grand council is not much different then what happens with elected officials in modern republics.

Certainly educating a largely under educated population present numerous challenges that will need to be overcome. Understandably, even the US' system of government is still a work in progress and is commonly misunderstood by large portions of its society, yet it is still found to work. Exactly because of this, the Afghan GET program must relentlessly focus on working with mostly tribal leadership to dispel misunderstandings and make certain that the tribal leadership understands that they will still have the ability to represent their own tribes with the only exception being through a modern system of government. Additionally, because of Afghan sensitivities to outside influence, the GET program would be an Afghan initiative that would consist of mostly Afghan personnel with limited support by outside agencies.

Again using the GET program to ensure the Afghans understand the current system of government and how it can be compared to their traditional systems is critically important. Changing this paradigm from tribe representation to elected representation is only a matter of getting their tribal leadership elected. Once elected the representative officials would be ethnically and morally tied to providing their tribesmen the services that most Afghans currently lack. With limited International, US State Department, and ISAF's support, the GET program could regularly engage the Afghan population in fundamental governance discussions and how it is expected to work for the people, the clan, and the tribes. By simply using the GETs to better educate Afghans to this concept and how it will benefit them, the Afghan government would be aided tremendously in defeating the anti-government propaganda that Taliban continually espouse.

Finally, before any counter-insurgency approach can have a realistic chance to work in Afghanistan, the levels of corruption, as well as the perception of corruption must be brought back to reasonable levels. The current perspective of most Afghans is that their government and politicians are corrupt. Those thoughts are backed by the recent polling by Transparency International Survey of 2009 on corruption that ranks Afghanistan 179 out of 180 countries[30]. However, for his part in reducing this dubious honor Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai, has recently sworn to improve his administration's efforts in countering the corruption problem that has damaged his government's popularity.[31] While it is uncertain as to what exact steps are being taken to counter the current corruption, the use of the GET program interacting with the public could provide an additional capacity as a "watchdog like" organization that would investigate claims of corruption.

Conclusion

While Afghanistan remains a very complicated country that has been influenced by centuries of warfare it is important to note that the US and its allies still have a remarkable opportunity to make a positive difference in the future of this region. Using the experience gained from the last nine years in two different wars, the US has now refocused its effort in Afghanistan. Provided with this new focus is a new commander and new counterinsurgency plan to seek victory in Afghanistan that some are calling the US' and Afghanistan's last chance for success.

In developing an approach that denies the Taliban its operational COG the US must seek to gain and maintain unity of effort with all its allies in the region as well as help Afghanistan build better government understanding in its people. By doing this, the US and Afghanistan with

support from Pakistan will be better able to apply the coordinated military pressure from all sides to win this war. Additionally, by using the GET program described in this paper the Afghan people would be better informed about the roles and responsibilities of their government. With the improved awareness, the people of Afghanistan would be better prepared to target poor government and counter the corruption that is playing a significant role in many of the regions that support the Taliban.

Using a strategic counterinsurgency plan that emphasizes the importance of the population, the US with its allies has embarked on whirlwind effort to demonstrate tangible success by 2011. In applying a greater emphasis on winning over the population (strategic COG), the US must first seek to deny the Taliban its sanctuary along the Afghan and Pakistan border (operational COG). By continuing to go after the population without putting together a plan that tackles the Taliban's sanctuary the US is going to run into the same problem the Soviets did in the 1980's. However, by developing a complete and synergistic plan that challenges the Taliban in its sanctuary as well as stabilizes Afghan government, the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan will effectively take away those things that the Taliban are using to support their strategic COG. Without an ability to support and sustain itself in its sanctuary, the Taliban will eventually be forced to negotiate or fight a losing battle that will eventually see Afghan and Pakistan security forces capable of dealing with the insurgency on their own.

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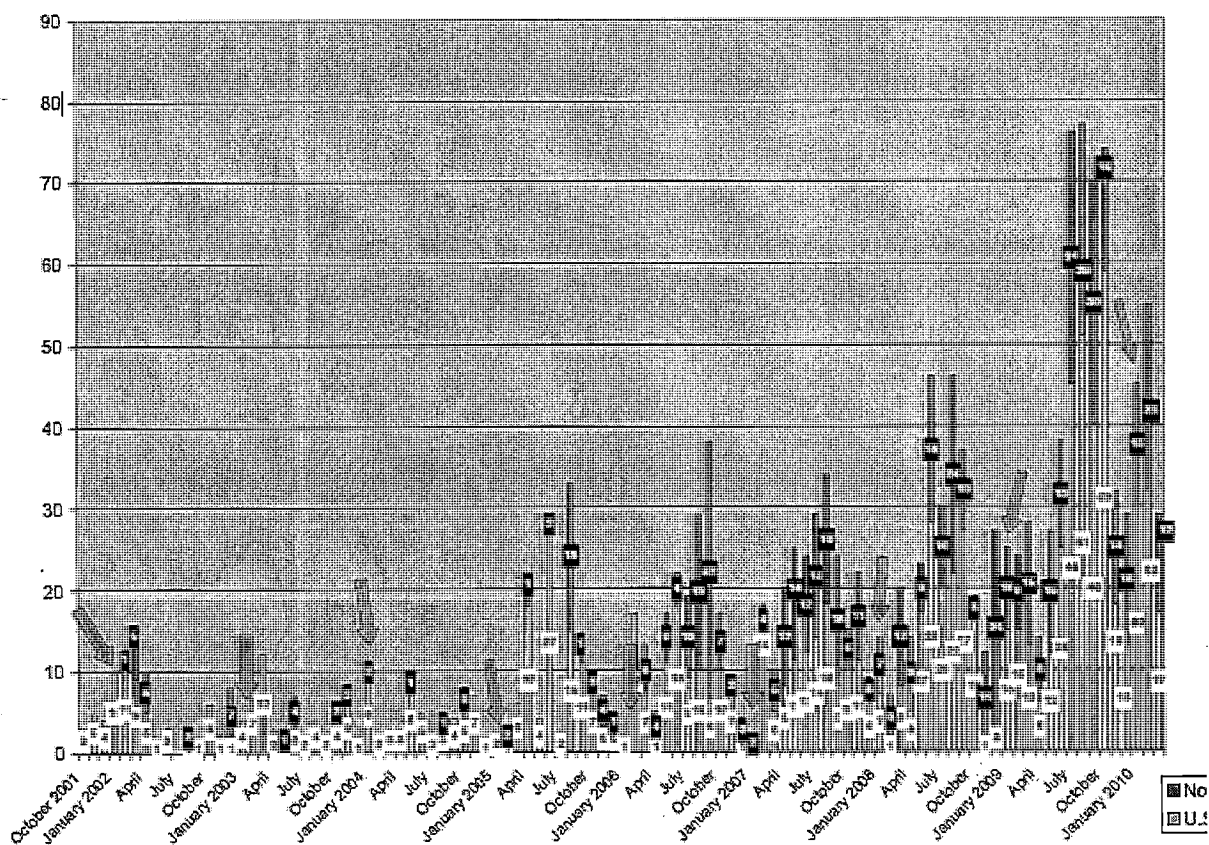[30] Lanham, Afghan Corruption Concerns US Policy Planners, Voice of America News / FIND, Nov 17, 2009. 1.

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Figure 1- Federally Administered Tribal Area
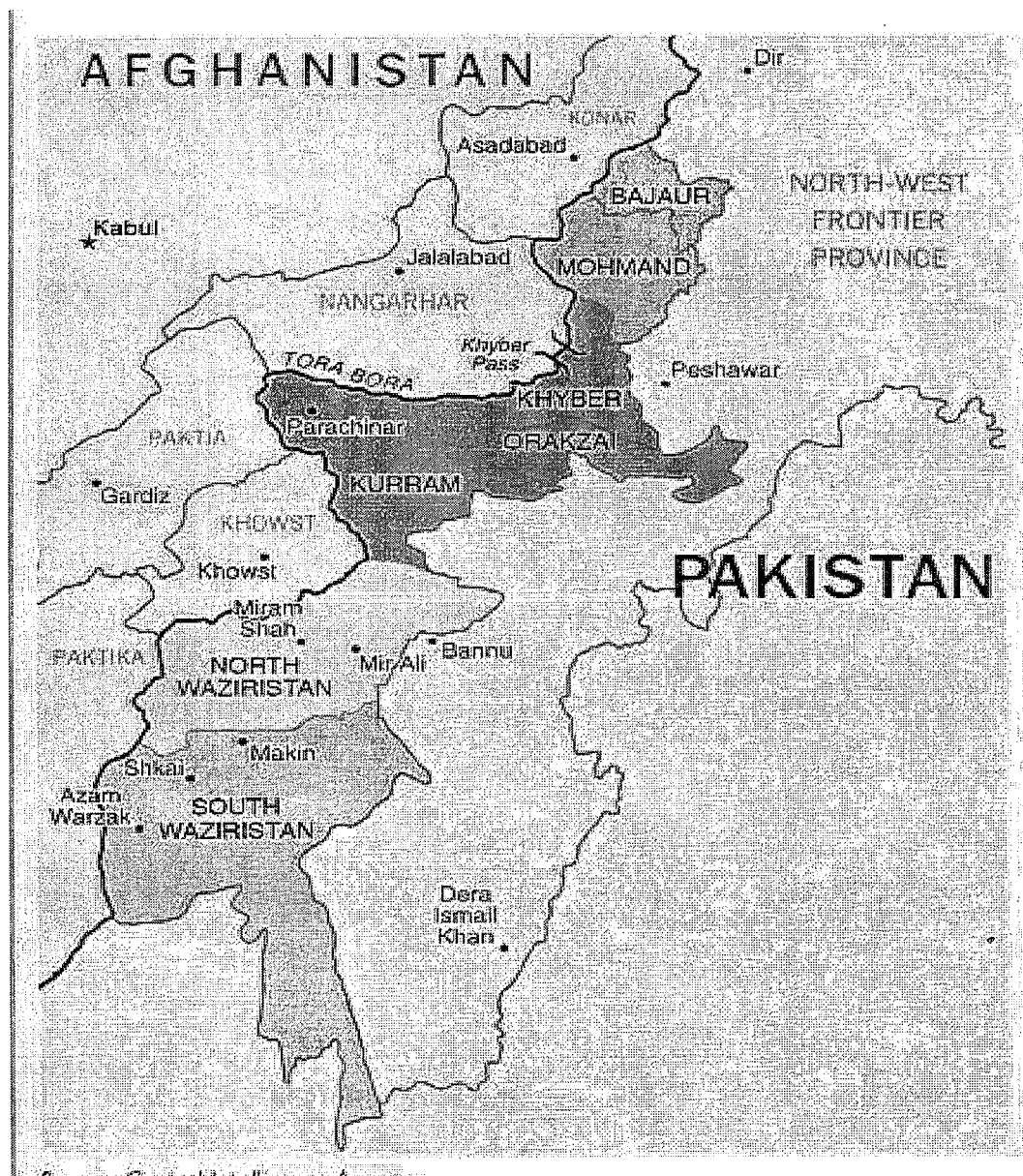
Figure 2- U.S. and Coalition Fatalities since October 7, 2001

Source: Brookings institute http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/Programs/FP/afghanistan%20index/index20100322.pdf

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